

**Sermon preached at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Kingstowne, Virginia,  
by Dr. David Fischler, on Sunday, January 1, 2017**

**THE NAME OF JESUS**

**Numbers 6:22-27; Luke 2:21**

Early in 2016, the users of website “readit” voted on their choices for the worst baby names. Not the most popular, but what they considered to be the scourges that had been laid upon children in the previous several months. And these names were actually given to children by parents who apparently hate them. They are barely born, they hardly know them and they already can’t stand them. Among the winners were Melanomia, Apaloosa, (apparently they took one look at that child and said, “That’s a horse face) Elizabreath, and then this one I can’t even pronounce. I can tell you how it’s spelled: ABCDE. Colon, Nebeah, (yes, “heaven” backwards) Meldor (a Tolkien fan with dyslexia), Beberly, and my personal favorite, Little Sweet Meat. Those of us of a certain age will remember that in the mid-seventies one of the best-selling rock albums ever was by a guy named Meatloaf. I think that’s who that person was thinking of. Not realizing that he did that to himself when he did that as an adult, he didn’t do that to his children.

There are three conclusions that I think reasonably can be drawn. One is that at least some of these parents didn’t know how to spell. A second is that, in prospect, as I mentioned, they already hated these children. And the third is that one day their children were going to hate them. Or, alternatively, their children were going to make peace with their parents and go to see a judge and pay \$100 to change their name to Bob and Jane. I don’t know why people do this to their children. Who wants to saddle their child with a name like Melanomia? I don’t understand that. Especially when there are lots of perfectly good names out there that don’t sound terrible and they even mean something wonderful.

Use my own family as an example. My name, of course, is David and that’s a name that comes from the Bible and means “well-beloved.” Of course! Why is that the biggest laugh I’ve gotten? Maryanne’s name is actually two biblical names. The first one, Mary, means “rebellion.” Did you know that? I’ve known that for 36 years. But the interesting thing is that if combined with Anna means “gracious, or one who gives. So, in terms of my wife, she graciously rebels against whoever. Our daughter, if she’d have been a boy, we had come down to two names. One was Jonathan, which means “given of God,” and the other was Benjamin, which means “son of the right hand.” Of course, the idea that we would be parents was one that struck us as a ludicrous idea and so if she had been a boy her middle name was going to be Isaac, which means “one who brings laughter,” because the whole idea was just funny. As it is, of course, she was a girl and her name is Rebecca, which means “fat” and if any of you ever tell her that I will never speak to you again, because she’s not.

What you call people makes a difference. The names that we carry with us make a difference. They are not destiny, but the truth is that we respond to some people better than others. My suspicion is that when young Melanomia gets to kindergarten the

children are not going to respond to him, at least not initially, as they would to Matthew or Phillip. Names make a difference. They're not just a collection of sounds or a collection of letters. But they both mean something and they say something about us. And that brings us to Luke, chapter 2.

In the Christmas story, one of the things that is really interesting is that it seems as though the person who comes as Messiah and as Savior had multiple names and that confuses some folks. It is true that He is called Immanuel in Matthew chapter 1. That's based in turn, of course, on Isaiah, chapter 7, verse 14, in which we're told that a virgin will conceive and bear a son, and will call his name Immanuel. And Matthew translates that and says that means "God with us." But we need to recognize that the name Immanuel is not a name in the usual sense. Instead, it's a title or a description. Everyone here, I'm sure, is aware of something that an awful lot of people out in the world are not, which is that "Christ" is not Jesus' surname. They didn't have surnames in those days. If you wanted to talk in terms of a surname at all He would've been "Bar-Joseph," the son of Joseph. Christ is not a name, but it's a title, and it means "Messiah." 2 Samuel, chapter 12, verses 24-25 has another example of that with regard to the birth of Solomon. We're told there that "Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba and he went to her and lay with her and she gave birth to a son and they named him Solomon. The Lord loved him and because the Lord loved him, He sent word to Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah. So was the son of David Solomon or was his name Jedidiah. Well, his name was Solomon and he was called Jedidiah as a title and it means "Beloved of Yahweh."

So titles and names, you have to recognize there's a difference between the two when we say that Savior, that the Messiah, was to be named Immanuel, that simply was a way of describing who He is, and who He is is "God with us." God in the flesh. God as a human being. God living among us and experiencing our sorrows and our griefs and our pains. Experiencing our joys, experiencing our wonders, experiencing everything it is to be human save sin. That's what Immanuel means. The real name of our Lord, of course, is Jesus. In Matthew 1:21 we are told, "She will bear a son and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save your people from their sins." Then in Luke chapter 2, verse 21 we're also told that they named Him Jesus on the eighth day. The eighth day was the day of circumcision. And that's why January 1 in the Christian calendar is not New Year's Day. New Year's Day in the Christian calendar is the first Sunday in Advent. That's when the new year begins. For Christians, January 1 is a day commemorating the name of Jesus, because it was on the eighth day after He was born that Jesus was taken to be circumcised and at that time He was given the name that the angel had told his parents that He should be named.

Now His name of course was not Jesus, to confuse you further if that's possible. His name actually was Yeshua. That's the Hebrew and it means "God saves" or "the Lord will save." And in English, if you take the Hebrew you apply each of the letters to English letters you get what name? Joshua. The Hebrew name Yeshua means Joshua. So if you've ever known a child or named one yourself who was named Joshua, that's a person who was named after the Lord. Where do we get Jesus from? Well, the Greek form of Yeshua, which is what Luke and Matthew were written in, is Iesous, and when

you turn that into English we get Jesus. And that name means “God is salvation.” And it’s obviously not a unique name. Some people think that it’s amazing that the name of Jesus was this completely new thing. No it wasn’t. There were lots of people named Jesus. There were lots of people who were named “The Lord saves” or “God is salvation.” And yet even though it was a common name it still says something about who the person it was given to is. And the reason is simply because this was God’s choice of name for this Child.

I don’t know how many of you in the course of having your children and deciding upon their names asked the Lord, “Show me what you want this child’s name to be.” And then when you thought you were given an answer you said this is the Lord’s name for this child. Maybe that’s the case, maybe it wasn’t. But in the case of our Lord Jesus Christ you can be sure that that was the name God had chosen for Him. And He had chosen that name because it would send a message about who He is. “Immanuel” said that He was God incarnate, God in the flesh. But that was a title. The name said that He would be one who would save His people. He would be the one through whom God would save His people. The name of Jesus lets us know that the Messiah is not a politician and He’s not going to use political means in order to set up a kingdom or to set Himself up as an earthly king. Nor would He be one who would simply show how people are to live. When we say that Jesus means “God is salvation” it doesn’t mean that He’s simply going to be a teacher who’s going to show us how to be more moral. It means He was the deliverer, the redeemer, one who will break the hold that sin has over God’s people. And that being the case, right from the beginning, even as He was named on the eighth day, Jesus was already being pointed forward to the cross. As I mentioned on Christmas Eve, God’s act of salvation is not just about the cross or just about the resurrection. The incarnation had an absolutely crucial role in that inasmuch as by joining together God and man, human nature is saved. But when Jesus received the name “Salvation is of God” or “God is salvation” He was being pointed toward His eventual destiny.

The same way that He was being pointed toward that destiny by the magi when they came and brought gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh, we all know that that was not a matter of “Well, what do we have on the shelf that we can give Him?” or “What’s the most valuable thing that we can give Him?” Each of those three gifts was meant to signify something that was ahead. He was given gold as a sign of the wealth of a king. He was given frankincense as an indicator that He would be one who would be a spiritual figure, a religious figure, a priestly figure. And He was given myrrh because that was used in the preparation of bodies for burial. I can only imagine Mary and Joseph receiving gold and being very thankful thinking “We can really use this. This is no toaster. We’re not sending this back!” And getting the frankincense and thinking, “This is such a wonderful smell to make our house smell so good.” And then the third gift they were given was the myrrh and they say, “Hmm. Are the stores open tomorrow? We can return this.” No apparent reason for that, but of course it looked forward in the same way that Jesus’ name looked forward. The name of Jesus, “God is salvation,” pointing ahead to the cross. The names that we give things, the names that we give one another are not just meaningless collections of sounds. They actually do say something. They say something about us, they say something about the world around us. And being given His

name, we are being pointed forward from Christmas to Good Friday and to Easter because they are not separate holidays. They are all tied together as one. If you want to see a concrete expression of how that works look at the Chrismon tree as you're on your way out and notice how many of the symbols on this tree we set out at the time of the birth of Christ point forward to the time of His suffering, of His death, of His resurrection.